Shipyards Speeded Up by Hurley's Methods

Man Who Picked Schwab as Director-General of Fleet Corporation Brought Order Out of Chaos

WITHIN Edward Nash Hurley's first nine months as chairman of the nation's Shipping Board and president of its Emergency Fleet Corporation order has been brought out of the chaos of controversy and disorganization that ruled when he took the twin jobs, effort has been concentrated and full speed ahead results have begun to appear.

To-day the most captious of all the critics who castigated our shipbuilding programme less than a year ago is bound to admit that the progress now reported is satisfactory. In a nation whose merchant marine and shipbuilding industry had been dead fifty years that industry has been rehabilitated on the vastest scale even seen in record time.

Hurley, the man we have to thank for all this, was neither an industrial organizer nor a shipbuilder to begin with. But he was a dynamo; that was why the President picked him out, and his performance in the most trying conditions and at the storm centre of critical denunciation has amply vindicated the President's choice.

Hurley Wanted Schwab.

His latest, perhaps his greatest single stroke, was securing Charles M. Schwab as Director-General of the Emergency Fleet Corporation. Hurley wanted Schwab, sent for him, got him—convincing the steel man of where his duty lay and assuring him of unrestricted powers—and then submitted the appointment to the White House. There are said to have been misgivings about the country's approval. Hurley was sure of it in advance. His enlistment of Schwab took place at his home three weeks ago to-day.

"I didn't want to do it at first," Schwab said frankly, discussing his acceptance, "but after the day with Mr. Hurley there was no other decision I could make except to come."

The moment he had made that decision Hurley went to the President, with whom he, Schwab, Charles Piez, vice-president of the Fleet Corporation, and other board members conferred at length next day. The result of the conference was that the appointment was announced.

Hurley had long had Schwab in mind. But so had other war work divisions and their executives. Hurley got action first. It's a way he has. And it is an open secret in Washington that he barely beat a strong competitor to it.

This stroke is a fair sample of the personal force before which the stupendous project of building more ships within a given time than any other nation ever contemplated is moving steadily forward, gaining new impetus every day.

Was Not a Shipbuilder.

Nationally Hurley was little known nine months ago. Business recalled him when it stopped to think as the pioneer sponsor of pneumatic riveting on two continents and pneumatic tool development in general. Before he went into that enterprise you could learn from works of biography he had managed the plant of the United States Metallic Packing Company in Philadelphia. Still earlier, in his twenties, he had been a railroad engineer and fireman in the West, a union man of course, and for a few months secretary to the chief of the engineers' brotherhood.

Official Washington knew him as having been in succession Secretary Redfield's choice in 1913 for trade commissioner to the Latin American republics, one of the President's appointees on the Federal Trade Commission—of which he became chairman—and then, with war on in Europe, a Red Cross councilman. And plenty of men in Washington knew him personally. They didn't, however, know or suspect the whirlwind executive who was to meet civilization's need of ships.

His appointment was announced July 24 last. To-day he is a national, an international figure.

Edward N. Hurley, chairman of the Shipping Board.

He came to his office the day after the appointment wondering where to begin. He found no smooth running organization a man could serenely direct; indeed it is just to say that he found no real organization at all. He started on the frank premise that he hardly knew a deck plate from a bobstay and knew nothing about shipbuilding (except, of course, the riveting) or ship operation. But he started free of hobbies and prejudices concerning methods and men. His one idea was to get ships built pronto. With the authority and resources of the nation behind him he headed straight for results. He dodged no tangles and obstacles, impatient as he was of them and as he is temperamentally of anything that hinders the course of work. He went through the heart of each difficulty and he never has had to go back.

Organizer and Diplomat.

The problems he found piled high in the office of the chairman were tackled, studied, disposed of one by one. To-day the chairman's desk top is always cleared. All the members of his office force know it is never quitting time until the last complication is resolved.

He found his organization, such as it then was, clogged with the technical controversies, the rival programme theories of which the newspapers at the time were full. This phase of the situation called for personality. Hurley had it of the species needed. Every one in contact with him calls him the kindliest and most courteous of executives. With all that, perhaps in part because of it, he lost no time in making it felt that the ship programme was going to be run harmoniously at the pace the chairman set. And presently it began to. Now it does.

The discussion of wood versus steel is forgotten with many others. The prophecy of Hurley's predecessor that a bridge of wooden ships would be speedily thrown across the sea remains far from fulfilment, but the piers for that bridge are laid and are substantial.

They tell you in Washington that "he has a way with him," meaning such a gift as engaging Irishmen traditionally have. Hurley may not be Irish, but that gift produces the traditional effect. His sense of humor survives all the stress; it brings him smiling through all the trying moments. Irate contractors or would-be contractors come to storm and remain to eat out of his hand. His immediate assistants are devoted to him. All the way down to the very hands in the yards the word is that a good man and a square boss heads the work.

At no stage of organization, reorganization and expansion has he ever been too busy to handle a perplexity himself or to see a caller. He found when he took charge that it was practically impossible to see all who sought business interviews in the orthodox routine way. So he invented a way somewhat like Roosevelt's as President. His outer office was constantly jammed with men after contracts, men after favors, shipbuilders after enlightenment, public officials after facts.

Hurley had reception rooms fixed up either side of his sanctum. Assistants went through the lobby, sifting callers into one room or another, according to the nature and importance of their errands. Between are swinging doors. Through these the chairman sails from group to group, sometimes keeping three interviews going at once. One finished, he dashes to the next pursued by a comet's tail of assistants with papers to be considered. A newspaper man who saw this arrangement in action for the first time likened it to Hanlon's "Superba" of his boyhood memories.

With all the routine the chairman does not sit in Washington and let things come to him. If a shipyard gets in difficulties, if labor gives trouble or the housing problem threatens a bad delay he catches the first train and sees about it personally. He often starts out abruptly to inspect the yards, particularly those in the East.

Combines Force and Energy.

Men who followed Roosevelt on his famed constitutionals about Washington found it no more killing than following Hurley through the yards. He travels at a pace that means exhaustion to any but the most active. He is never still a minute, but skips from plate mill to pattern shop, and from there to the deck of a giant freighter with an agility that has caused many a workman to pause in wonder at "the bird with those clothes who could go up the side like that." Once on the deck or the scaffold he is at home with the riveters and can drive a rivet with the best of them.

Shipyard managers used to say that Hurley went through a plant so fast he did not see a thing, but now they know better. There were times when some of them were called to Washington and asked about things they perhaps would have preferred he hadn't seen. A party of

Job of Building More Ships in a Given Time Than Any Other Nation Now Well Under Way

Washington correspondents went on an inspection tour not long ago in certain Eastern yards. They were strung out for half a mile behind the chairman and at least two were lost altogether coming home.

It is this force and energy, together with the ability to get at the fundamentals of a situation, that has brought the shipping programme to a point where ships are being launched with regularity and shipbuilding controversies and investigations are no longer on the front pages of the newspapers every day.

The Shipping Board chairman has lost weight under the strain. This is apparent to all of his friends, but he has lost none of his force.

Shipbuilding on Firm Basis.

When Hurley was named to succeed William Denman on the Shipping Board the organization and the building programme were in embryo, and the embryo was considerably scrambled. Many contracts had been let, but little progress had been made. Many of the yards having contracts were not built. Others were unable to start production. It was months later that the first vessels were put in the water. Since then wood and steel construction has been standardized. The programme has been made orderly, a labor situation that threatened to stop production on both coasts has been composed and difficulties over materials have been straightened out. A well defined programme for concrete ship construction has been laid down. The first concrete ship, projected but three months ago, has landed her first cargo in France from the Pacific coast.

This has not been accomplished without many setbacks. But production is what counts and production is coming on apace. The Hog Island plant has been rectified along with the other difficulties. Three general managers of the Fleet Corporation have come and gone, and it is admitted that a good number of shipyard owners and operators need further education in shipbuilding and efficiency, but there is little doubt in official Washington that ship production is now on a firm basis.

Chairman Hurley will make no estimate of the ultimate result for the year 1918, but he is driving for 3,500,000 tons and possibly 5,000,000.

The Public Lands.

THAT Uncle Sam has been something of a real estate dealer in his time is attested by the records of the Land Office at Washington, which is more than a century old.

Nearly all of the land in the country outside of the thirteen original colonies has at some time been owned by the Government. A billion and a quarter acres have been sold or given away; about 3,000,000 acres, including the national forests, parks and military reservations, are still retained.

Until half a century ago the only policy of the Government with regard to its lands was to sell them at the best price obtainable. The first sale was in 1787, when 2,000,000 acres in Ohio were sold at auction in New York for $1 an acre.

The largest sales in any year were those of 1836, when 20,000,000 acres were disposed of. The great panic of 1837 was due largely to the general speculation of the year before in public lands.

In 1862 the enactment of the homestead laws put an end to the policy of selling public lands solely for the revenue they would bring; the new laws, under certain conditions, provided homes for settlers.

About that time the Government began also to give land to railways as an inducement to build in undeveloped regions. In this manner 190,000,000 acres have been given away—an area nearly as large as that of the thirteen original colonies. But the Government has not confined its generosity to the railways; fully one-seventh of the whole public domain has been given to the soldiers of our wars.